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About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

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An Overview of Syria's Armed Revolution

By Derek Henry Flood



Free Syrian Army supporters display their flag and flash the "V" sign for victory. - Photo by Bulent Kilic/AFP/Getty Images

SINCE THE START of the Syrian uprising on March 15, 2011, it has morphed from largely peaceful mass street protests to the current climate where parts of the country are engaged in armed conflict pitting the Free Syrian Army (FSA) against the Alawite-dominated security forces of President Bashar al-Assad. Syria's demonstrations began in the wake of the largely successful revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia and in the midst of the violent regime responses to their counterparts in Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya. After small-scale events spiraled out of control in the southern city of Dera`a, the critical juncture in the evolution of the FSA occurred when regime forces moved into the northern town of Jisr al-Shughour with heavy armor beginning on June 4, 2011, after Damascus claimed that more than 100 of

its security forces were killed by rebels.¹ The Syrian regime's countermeasures in Jisr al-Shughour created an exodus of refugees into Turkey and the declaration of the establishment of the FSA.

Turkey's Syrian refugee crisis has only worsened in recent months as regime forces moved back into northern cities once under de facto FSA control. Civilians and rebels alike are entering southern Turkey in greater numbers, indicative of Damascus' brutal efforts to regain control of population centers in Idlib and Halab governorates. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has brokered a joint UN-Arab League ceasefire and tentative monitoring mission, but it has little chance of affecting the situation on the ground in Syria.

¹ "Syria: What Really Happened in Jisr al-Shughour?" BBC, June 7, 2011.

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This article asserts that the FSA is foremost a national liberation movement determined to overthrow the al-Assad regime through a war of attrition. The FSA would prefer a rapid paced revolution, but as the prospect for an external military intervention evaporated over the course of the past year, the rebels have had to be self-reliant while hoping for touted help from individual nation-states. The FSA sees a campaign of protracted warfare coupled with an increase in military defections as its only realistic way forward. The isolation and unanticipated duration of the conflict has led to increased sectarianism in Syria, encouraged regional powers aligned with President Bashar al-Assad to grant him support, and kept the conflict a highly asymmetrical one as the outgunned FSA continues to battle well-armed, pro-regime forces.

Between Nationalism and Sectarianism

Although the FSA describes itself as a national liberation movement, it remains primarily a Sunni outfit, whose aim is to dislodge the elite Alawite minority government in Damascus. The FSA strongly believes that the demise of the al-Assad government is nothing short of inevitable. Such a stark development would signal the end of pan-Arabism borne of anti-colonial sentiment in the region during the 1950s and 1960s along with the Arab Socialism envisioned by Hizb-ul-Ba`ath ideologue Michel Aflaq. Unable to burnish genuine Islamic credentials in the eyes of orthodox Sunnis and Shi`a, the emerging Alawite political elites of the middle Cold War period led by the al-Assad family cloaked themselves in the banner of Arab nationalism that was prevalent in the Levant and North Africa at the time. They attempted to stifle potential sectarianism by creating a one-party secular Ba`athist state that tolerated no dissent.

Syria's rebels take inspiration from those who toppled the Libyan regime by colloquially referring to themselves as "al-Shabab" ("the youth," and unrelated to the group by the same name in southern Somalia) and making a "V" sign with their index and middle fingers while posing for photos. In another act of apparent mimicry of their more successful Libyan revolutionary counterparts, the FSA as well as the

Syrian National Council (SNC)² have reverted to a flag pre-dating the current regime as a way of visually asserting claims on their country's semi-mythologized earlier history.³

Syria's armed opposition proudly flies the pre-Hizb-ul-Ba`ath-era (Ba`ath Party) flag as a way of differentiating itself from those Syrians still loyal to the regime. The flag hoisted by the FSA and SNC is the green, white and black tricolor with three five-pointed

stars symbolizing the three *vilayets* (administrative regions) of Damascus, Aleppo, and Deir-ez-Zor dating back to the French Mandate period. First flown in 1932, it was used during the decolonization period from France in 1946 until the formation of the United Arab Republic in 1958, which united Syria with Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt.⁴ After the dissolution of that short-lived union, Syria briefly reverted to this

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2 The Syrian National Council is an exile political opposition body headquartered in Istanbul, Turkey. The SNC was formed on August 23, 2011, to coordinate the efforts of differing dissident factions seeking the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. See "Syrian Opposition Moves Toward Setting up National Council," Associated Press, August 23, 2011.

3 The forces of Libya's National Transitional Council employed the tricolor flag that existed during Libya's pre-Qadhafi, post-independence period under King Idriss Sanussi, while destroying the monochromatic green flag designated as Libya's national symbol in 1977 denoting the enforced ideology of Qadhafi's pervasive Green Book.

4 Cleveland Henry Smith and Gertrude Rhoda Taylor, *Flags of All Nations* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1946), p. 137.

Although a few of the FSA's declarative videos have featured a black jihadist banner as a prop similar to that used by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the FSA is largely a desperate, isolated movement unconnected to al-Qa`ida or other global jihadist movements.⁵ Its mandate is strictly limited to the overthrow of the al-Assad government and the liberation of Syria from tyrannical rule. The FSA, the SNC, and the opposition Local Coordinating Committees (LCC) have all rejected the terrorist label bestowed upon them by the al-Assad regime and espouse the democratization of Syria. An LCC statement issued in February echoed this sentiment: "acts in torturing and killing its [the regime's] opponents are very similar to those used by al-Qaida members in annihilating anybody who disapprove with their dark believes [sic] and ideologies."⁶ As the conflict's convoluted narrative drags on, the regime continues to insist it is battling internationally-backed terrorists without providing verifiable evidence and denying unfettered access to international journalists. Videos have surfaced on YouTube and jihadist forums claiming responsibility for suicide bombings in Damascus and Aleppo, which appear to feed some of the regime's claims. Opposition activists have claimed that at least some of these attacks have been false flag operations designed to demonize their cause.⁷ The FSA dismissed an overture by Ayman

5 For example, see "Homs | Formation of Al-Bara'a Bin Malik Battalion – FSA," accessed February 29, 2012, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jk3jAlfKn9s.

6 Lara Jakes and Mazin Yahya, "Iraqis Profit From Syrian Arms Smuggling," Associated Press, February 18, 2012.

7 Albert Aji and Lee Keath, "Syria Says Suicide Bombers Kill 28 in Aleppo," Associated Press, February 10, 2012; "Syrian Opposition Figure Says Assad's Regime Plotting a Massive Blast in Aleppo," al-Arabiya, January 6, 2012.

al-Zawahiri aimed at encouraging an al-Qa`ida-style jihad in Syria. Being primarily a horizontally rather than vertically integrated movement, the FSA cannot singularly control all of its media output, but the overwhelming majority of its published statements refute possible alignment with international jihadism, insisting that their war is an indigenous one.⁸

The FSA is also keen to insist that its defectors do not singularly hail from Syria's Sunni majority and that it has at least some support from both Alawites and Syrians from differing Christian denominations. "The regime is killing people, not just one sect" were the words of an FSA commander on the issue, who explained that there were still Sunnis who had prospered under massively corrupt cronyism who remained allied with al-Assad in the face of mass shelling of Sunni communities in Homs, Idlib and other cities.⁹

Oppositionists of all hues insist that the al-Assad regime is purposefully manipulating sectarian divisions to strengthen itself as it confronts grave danger. The Sunni revolt by the Muslim Brotherhood that took place from 1976-1982 in many ways set the stage for the current conflict. Hafez al-Assad saw not a hint of irony in obliterating his domestic Islamist opponents, culminating in the notorious February 1982 scorched earth campaign in the northern city of Hama while simultaneously openly supporting Lebanese and Palestinian Islamist resistance groups that threatened Israel.¹⁰ A component of the confrontation currently tearing Syria apart stems from Hafez al-Assad's diligence to consolidate Syria's fragmented minority mosaic by pitting non-Sunnis fearful of being disenfranchised by political Islam should the Alawite regime be toppled against Syria's majority Sunni religious demographic. Sectarianism in Syria was therefore entrenched by the state, and the fissures occurring in early 2012,

rather than erupting in a historical vacuum, were in fact sown decades ago with the brutal repression of Sunni Islamism from the very outset of the al-Assad dynasty. Some of the parallels between Hama in 1982 and the current war in Syria are startling. Rifaat al-Assad, Hafez's younger brother, was the brutal enforcer then in Hama in much the same manner as Maher al-Assad, Bashar's younger brother, is today. Indeed, Hama's phone lines and road connections were cut-off in 1982, and today the government has pursued the same strategy in Homs, although with contemporary updates such as the disruption of internet service.¹¹

The FSA commanders who spoke with this author in Syria on January 29, 2012, were keen to reinforce the notion that they had no agenda, sectarian or otherwise, other than ending the al-Assad family's hold on power for the past four decades. They vaguely stated that they sought to turn Syria into an open democratic society with a representative government, ending decades of Alawite minority tyranny. Yassin, a local commander, stated, "we don't belong to any group. Not Salafi, not Ikhwan. We are not allied to any [pre-existing] interest [group] in Syria. Our struggle is a search for freedom."¹² Abu Muhammed, a regional commander, explained that not all Alawite social cohesion in the regime's armed forces is voluntary. He said that some high-ranking military officers are simply obliged to enforce the bloody writ of Bashar al-Assad because the regime can exploit its capacity to punish the relatives of those who refuse to cooperate in the regime's extraordinarily repressive measures.¹³ Contradictory often to their own insistence that the Syrian conflict is not explicitly sectarian in nature, FSA fighters and supporters took no pains to hide their contempt for the Alawite sect, whom they felt had not only oppressed Syria's Sunni masses for years but also failed to adhere to their more conservative religious and cultural norms.

The Regional Struggle

The FSA believes it is under siege not only from the al-Assad regime, but from a vast cross-section of regional state, sub-state, and extra regional state actors. A conflict in Syria is one that cannot help but pull in regional and global actors due to its critical geography in the Levant. The FSA argues that such interlopers harbor deep fears of Syria becoming a representative democracy with a Sunni-led governing structure. While the forces of the Maher al-Assad-led Fourth Armored Division coupled with the various tiers of Syria's mukhabarat intelligence services are seen as the armed opposition's main battlefield opponents, the FSA also views Iran along with its Lebanese and Iraqi clients as principal belligerents in the conflict.

Since the late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad began to tilt toward Hizb Allah at the end of the 1980s after it defeated its Shi`a peer competitor Harakat Amal in a sub-conflict within Lebanon's civil war, Syria has acted as a land and air bridge for Iranian arms and materiel to reach Hizb Allah in Lebanon.¹⁴ When Bashar al-Assad ascended to power upon the death of his father in 2000, Syria became a principal supplier of arms to Hizb Allah as well as being an Iranian conduit.¹⁵ Syria and Iran have little to no common ground in terms of theological ideology, which makes opposition to Israel the glue that bonds these two very different states together.

The FSA stated to this author that Tehran is supplying highly trained military men including experienced snipers to assist its regular army as well as the freelance *shabiba* militiamen.¹⁶ A pro-FSA humanitarian logistician claimed that non-lethal Iranian materiel used to suppress demonstrators was being offloaded at the port of Latakia.¹⁷ The FSA also spoke of a civilian airfield in the Latakia area that was being upgraded to accept Iranian aircraft so that they could swiftly offload weapons to Syrian

⁸ Abdul Sattar Hatita, "Free Syrian Army Reject Jihadists Help," *Ashraq al-Awsat*, February 23, 2012.

⁹ Personal interview, regional FSA commander, Idlib Governorate, Syria, January 29, 2012.

¹⁰ William Harris, *Challenges to Democracy in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), p. 10.

¹¹ Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Nation Books, 2002), p. 183.

¹² Personal interview, local FSA commander, Idlib Governorate, Syria, January 29, 2012.

¹³ Personal interview, regional FSA commander, Idlib Governorate, Syria, January 29, 2012.

¹⁴ Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God: Hezbollah's Thirty Year Struggle Against Israel* (New York: Random House, 2011), pp. xvi, 90-92.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 337-338.

¹⁶ Personal interview, regional FSA commander, Idlib Governorate, Syria, January 29, 2012.

¹⁷ Derek Henry Flood, "Looking into the Syrian Abyss," *Asia Times Online*, January 28, 2012.

forces fighting the FSA.¹⁸ They believe the regime would crumble in short order without such steadfast Iranian support.

Lebanese Hizb Allah became subordinate to a Damascene agenda when it “sacrificed its political independence and integrity...for the sake of preserving the resistance to Israeli occupation.”¹⁹ The FSA accuses Hizb Allah of being directly involved in the conflict in its support of the Syrian regime, a charge the group’s leaders flatly deny, contradicting their well-known stance, stating, “After some Syrian opposition parties and Arab media accused Hizb Allah of shelling the city of Zabadani, Hizb Allah deems this accusation silly, funny and baseless.”²⁰

As for Iraq, under former leader Saddam Hussein the country was isolated for decades by Iran with which it fought an eight-year long war. After a bitter schism developed within the Ba`ath, Iraq also sparred with Syria for the leadership of Arab socialism. With both Saddam long dead and the U.S.-led military coalition in Iraq almost gone, a Baghdad no longer tethered to Washington is able to pursue an overtly pro-Iranian foreign policy, with its Shi`a prime minister Nuri al-Maliki openly buttressing the al-Assad regime. The al-Maliki government had quarreled with Syria for several years, but Baghdad has moved closer to al-Assad. Al-Maliki is unable, however, to back al-Assad as unequivocally as Iran due to possible spillover effects that could upset Iraq’s fragile sectarian and ethnic balancing act. In fact, more recently al-Maliki softened his supportive stance, stating in the Saudi daily *Okaz* that al-Assad was not immune to the winds of change. A statement issued by the Iraqi prime minister’s office read, “Iraq backs change in Syria...Change is necessary. The situation will not be stable without change.”²¹ As the head of a fractious coalition government beguiled by a fugitive Sunni vice president, al-Maliki now insists that Iraq must remain neutral with regard to Syria while simultaneously

criticizing Saudi and Qatari talk of openly arming the FSA.²²

At least a limited amount of small arms are being smuggled into eastern Syria from Mosul, and it is likely that some fighters from the ISI or other al-Qa`ida fighters have entered Syria. This belief is being used as a wedge issue by the international community to avoid intervening militarily in the conflict as it did in Libya in 2011. The Iraqi government has said that it is beefing up security along its 373-mile long border with Syria to thwart possible infiltration of arms and presumably Sunni fighters.²³

The Russian Federation has been deeply involved in supplying Syria with arms for many years. As the primary successor state of the defunct Soviet Union, Moscow has ties to the al-Assads that date to their earliest days in power at the outset of the 1970s. The Soviets supplied Syria with a massive amount of arms in the build-up to the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Soviet military advisers were on the ground inside Syria, and Israeli Defense Minister Shimon Peres revealed to the Knesset in July 1974 that Israeli forces had killed Soviet officers on the Golan Heights front during battle.²⁴ Irrespective of Western pressure, the SNC believes that the Russian armaments pipeline is continuing uninterrupted during the current conflict, whereby shipments embark from the small Ukrainian commercial port of Oktyabrsk near the Black Sea, transiting the narrow Bosphorus Straits that divide Istanbul, stopping at the Greek Cypriot port of Limassol before finally arriving at the Russian naval facility in the Alawite stronghold of Tartus to be trucked to various military installations throughout government-held or contested areas of Syria.²⁵

Prospects for Arming the Free Syrian Army

The al-Assad regime has repeatedly claimed that it is fighting “foreign-backed terrorists” while refusing to cite any empirical evidence for its assertions.²⁶ If the FSA has indeed been successful procuring small arms from outside Syria, it is most certainly through its own crude financing and logistics networks. The FSA sees the only possible conduit for outsiders arming them as through Turkish territory with Ankara being the only friendly power in the region. Although there are non-state Sunni actors in Iraq that are sympathetic to their cause, the FSA views the Shi`a-led government in Baghdad as being overtly hostile to their aims. While a certain amount of arms have been smuggled into southeastern Syria from Lebanon, the FSA sees the fractious Lebanese state as being either dominated by, or fearful of, Hizb Allah’s power and hence unable to aid Syrian rebels. Hizb Allah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah has enacted what he calls a “disassociation policy” to avoid an internal split among Lebanon’s political leaders between those supportive of al-Assad and the anti-Syrian, pro-Western March 14 Alliance led by Saad Hariri.²⁷

An FSA commander who spoke with this author at a front line position in northwestern Syria’s Idlib Governorate said that the only practical way for his rebels to get the arms they claim to desperately need is vis-à-vis Turkey. In his view, Turkey, in its capacity as both a comparatively open society and a NATO military power, is the only realistic prospect for creating the desired “buffer zone” and delivering arms to the rebels.²⁸ Turkey has strenuously avoided getting militarily involved in the Syrian war despite such egregious transgressions as Syrian forces shooting and killing individuals in the Oncupinar refugee camp inside Turkey’s Kilis Province on April 9.²⁹

²² Mohamad Ali Harissi and Ammar Karim, “Iraq Slams Qatar, Saudi on Arms for Syria Rebels,” Agence France-Presse, April 1, 2012; “Iraqi PM Says Syria’s ‘Neutrality’ is for the Country’s ‘Best Interest,’” Agence France-Presse, April 15, 2012.

²³ Ahmed Rasheed, “Iraq Tightens Security at Syria Border to Stop Arms Flow,” Reuters, February 18, 2012.

²⁴ Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars 1945-1980* (Cambridge, NJ: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 123-124, 135.

²⁵ Personal interview, Khaled Khoja, Istanbul, Turkey, February 4, 2012. Also see Thomas Grove and Erika Sol-

omon, “Russia Boosts Arms Sales to Syria Despite World Pressure,” Reuters, February 21, 2012.

²⁶ Dominic Evans, “Friends of Syria to Call for Ceasefire, Aid Access,” Reuters, February 24, 2012.

²⁷ “Hezbollah: Disassociation Policy, Compromise to Keep Cabinet,” Now Lebanon, February 24, 2012.

²⁸ Personal interview, local FSA commander, Idlib Governorate, Syria, January 29, 2012.

²⁹ Elizabeth A. Kennedy and Andrea Glioti, “Syria Violence Crosses into Turkey, Lebanon,” Associated Press, April 9, 2012; Tulay Karadeniz and Khaled Oweis, “Syr-

The FSA boasted to this author that they could “finish off the [Assad] regime in a month’s time” if an outside actor would step in and arm them. Unfortunately for the FSA, NATO command in Brussels has adamantly and consistently stated it will not become involved in the Syrian conflict in the manner it intervened in Libya even if a UN mandate were to emerge providing NATO the crucial legal framework to do so.³⁰

The arms race between the two belligerents in Syria is quintessentially asymmetrical as a trickle of well-worn, light weapons fall into rebel hands while the military, irregular *shabiba* militia and mukhabarat continue to be supplied with guns and materiel allegedly from Russia and Iran as well as China and North Korea. Rebel prospects may change if saber-rattling Saudi Arabia or Qatar follow up with recent statements of support they have issued in the wake of a hamstrung international community,³¹ the latter of which is unwilling to act on the FSA’s behalf due to concerns about igniting a much wider conflict in the region or enabling further destabilization.³²

Derek Henry Flood is an independent analyst focusing on MENA, Central and South Asia. Mr. Flood is a correspondent for Asia Times Online and has written for Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst. Previously, he served as editor of The Jamestown Foundation's Militant Leadership Monitor, a terrorism publication he launched. Mr. Flood regularly speaks on insurgency, irregular warfare and geopolitics in the media and at conferences in the United States and in the European Union.

ian Border Clashes Wound at least 5 in Turkey,” Reuters, April 9, 2012.

30 Simon Cameron-Moore and Tulay Karadeniz, “NATO to Stay out of Syria Even if U.N. Mandate Emerges,” Reuters, February 18, 2012.

31 The normally quiescent Saudis have become increasingly and unusually vocal about the prospect of openly arming the FSA. Saudi Arabia and Iran have fought numerous sectarian proxy battles for decades, most notably in Lebanon, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

32 Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Syrian Army Pounds Rebels, New Move at U.N.” Reuters, February 28, 2012.

French Counterterrorism Policy in the Wake of Mohammed Merah’s Attack

By Pascale Combelles Siegel

FOR 16 YEARS, French counterterrorism officials successfully prevented a number of terrorist attacks. Human and technical surveillance, close coordination between justice and police, special courts exclusively composed of magistrates, legal authority to arrest and detain, and the ability to prosecute individuals based on intent to commit a terrorist attack enabled the French government to “neutralize an average of two to three groups representing a serious menace every year; that is to say groups ready to spring into action and conduct attacks,” according to French antiterrorism judge Marc Trevidic.¹ Last month, however, a 23-year-old Frenchman of Muslim faith, Mohammed Merah, evaded the system and killed three French soldiers, three Jewish children, and one Jewish teacher in an eight day shooting spree from March 11-19, 2012. Merah was identified and located the day after the last shooting at the Ozar Hatorah School in Toulouse and killed by police on March 22 after a 32-hour siege.

The first successful terrorist attack in 16 years in France is shaping up to be a watershed moment for French counterterrorism policy. The failure to prevent the attacks, the eight-day delay in identifying Merah as the assailant, and the police’s inability to capture him alive to stand trial after a 32-hour media frenzied stand-off prompted unusually vocal public and pointed criticisms of the French counterterrorism establishment. Such criticisms are uncommon in France because counterterrorism operations usually occur far from the public sphere and parliamentary oversight is limited. Of course, the fact that the shooting spree occurred amidst a presidential campaign fueled the controversies, but the criticisms go beyond politics as usual and raise key questions for the future of French counterterrorism policy.

1 Marc Semo, “Affaiblie, la nébuleuse passe par des voies détournées,” *Liberation*, November 1, 2010.

Journalists questioned why the Direction Centrale du Renseignement Interieur (DCRI) failed to uncover Merah’s plan before it was executed, and why it took so long to identify him as the assailant.² Others wondered why the police took 32 hours to neutralize Merah when he was barricaded in an apartment.³ In the aftermath of Merah’s death, French Foreign Affairs Minister Alain Juppe spoke of a DCRI failure,⁴ while Minister of Defense Gerard Longuet asked whether too much time had been spent on ultimately irrelevant leads.⁵ Front National presidential candidate Marine Le Pen accused the government of being too soft on radical Islamists and called for stricter immigration laws.⁶ Socialist candidate Francois Hollande asked for a review of all current antiterrorism laws, organizations, and procedures.⁷ Green candidate Eva Joly and several Socialist deputies criticized the police raid as ineffective or unlawful. Some called for the resignation of Minister of Interior Claude Gueant.⁸

This article will examine how Merah slipped through France’s counterterrorism defenses, as well as why it took so long to apprehend him. It will then review the legal, organizational, and political fallout as a result of the incident.

2 Yves Bordenave and Laurent Borredon, “Questions sur la surveillance de Mohammed Merah par la DCRI,” *Le Monde*, March 22, 2012; Francois Heisbourg, “Une commission d’enquête s’impose,” *Le Monde*, March 29, 2012.

3 Laurent Borredon, “L’opération du RAID à Toulouse en cinq questions,” *Le Monde*, March 22, 2012; “Des ex-militaires israéliens critiquent l’opération menée par le RAID,” *Le Monde*, March 23, 2012.

4 “Toulouse: Juppé évoque une faille du renseignement,” *Le Monde*, March 22, 2012.

5 “La piste d’ex-militaires a fait perdre ‘un temps considérable,’ selon Gérard Longuet,” *Le Monde*, March 23, 2012.

6 “Marine Le Pen: Merah: La partie émerge de l’iceberg,” RTL.fr, March 26, 2012.

7 “François Hollande évoque à son tour une ‘faille’ dans la surveillance de Merah,” *Le Monde*, March 23, 2012.

8 Faustine Léo, “Toulouse: La charge de Joly contre Guéant et le pouvoir,” LeParisien.fr, March 22, 2012; “Toulouse: L’UMP et le PS s’accusent tour à tour d’indécence,” *Le Monde*, March 22, 2012.

What Went Wrong?

According to French Internal Intelligence Chief Bernard Squarcini, nothing went wrong. In an interview to *Le Monde*, Squarcini argued that Merah went undetected because he was “undetectable,” the product of an atypical Salafi-jihadi self-radicalization process. He became radicalized alone while reading the Qur'an in prison. He was neither connected to any known jihadist organizational structure, nor did he travel to the Middle East and the Caucasus through the established and monitored organized channels.⁹ Nevertheless, there are a number of key questions in light of Merah's attack.

Was Mohammed Merah misdiagnosed as a dangerous individual susceptible to engagement in terrorist attacks?

In May 2011, Bernard Squarcini identified three key risk factors for propensity to engage in terrorism: membership in or association with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), having attended a militant training camp in Pakistan, and being a societal loner.¹⁰ Merah was known for being a loner with psychiatric troubles, a propensity for violence, and for having traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2010 and 2011.¹¹ Based on the DCRI's own recognition that profiles such as Merah were susceptible to act, a fair question is why Merah was not more closely monitored before his move to violence. It is also surprising that after the first murder, controlling those individuals known to have traveled to Afghanistan or Pakistan—about two dozen, according to terrorism expert Francois Heisbourg—did not become a top priority. Merah was not identified as a possible suspect until after the second attack on March 15; his connection to the first victim was uncovered on March 17, two days before the attack at the Ozar Hatorah School. An early check on the whereabouts of known travelers

to Afghanistan and Pakistan—which would have flagged Merah—might have prevented the last two attacks.

Why did the DCRI only learn of Merah in the fall of 2010?

According to Bernard Squarcini, the DCRI first learned of Mohammed Merah after he was captured by Afghan security forces in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in November 2010.¹² According to the *Nouvel Observateur*, however, in 2006 the Renseignements Generaux (RG)—a service that would later be fused with the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST) into the DCRI—had

“Based on the DCRI's own recognition that profiles such as Merah were susceptible to act, a fair question is why Merah was not more closely monitored before his move to violence.”

determined Merah to be a threat to the state's security. An administrative note written in 2006 categorized him as a “member of the radical Islamist movement likely to travel abroad and provide logistical assistance to extremist militants.”¹³ Squarcini's interview indicates that the DCRI did not know about the RG record. According to the *Nouvel Observateur*, the record was lost in 2008 at the time of the DCRI's creation. The French government has neither confirmed nor denied this new information.¹⁴

Does the DCRI have the capability to detect lone wolves?

According to Bernard Squarcini, the DCRI questioned Mohammed Merah after his 2010 journey to Afghanistan. The service contacted him when he was in Pakistan in 2011 and interviewed him again upon his return to Toulouse. At that point, he was put under surveillance

for a few months. The surveillance revealed no suspicious religious or ideological activities.¹⁵ This raises the question as to whether the DCRI is prepared to effectively disrupt plots by true “lone wolf” terrorists with no organizational links to an established cell. Moreover, it appears that the DCRI prioritizes identifying and disrupting terrorist cells, rather than developing better methods to mitigate the risk from a lone wolf.

Should Merah's extensive travel throughout the Middle East, Central and South Asia raised more alarm?

According to Bernard Squarcini, Merah traveled extensively, to Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In 2010, he was picked up by Afghan security forces in Kandahar, handed to U.S. forces, and then put on a Paris-bound plane after alerting the French military intelligence services. Neither the DCRI nor the Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieure (DGSE) had known that he was in Afghanistan. Yet by that time, Mohammed Merah and his brother, Abdelkader, had already been involved with the ringleader of a small group accused of sending young French aspiring jihadists to Iraq. Mohammed visited the ringleader in prison, and the Merah brothers arranged for the ringleader's father to marry their mother.¹⁶ Mohammed had traveled extensively in the Middle East on the modest salary of an auto mechanic. Yet, according to the *Nouvel Observateur*, after interviewing Merah upon his return from Pakistan in December 2011, the DCRI labeled him a “militant close to the jihadist movement” and requested that they be notified if he crosses any state borders.¹⁷ This begs the question as to whether the DCRI misinterpreted key clues based on the countries to which he traveled, the conditions in which he traveled, and his connections to people who had been involved in an effort to send foreign fighters to Iraq in 2007.

⁹ Laurent Borredon and Jacques Fallorou, “Bernard Squarcini: Nous ne pouvions pas aller plus vite,” *Le Monde*, March 23, 2012.

¹⁰ Yves Bordenave and Rémy Ourdan, “Bernard Squarcini: La France est la cible n°2 d'Al-Qaeda,” *Le Monde*, May 7, 2011.

¹¹ Emilie Cazi and Ariane Chemin, “Mohammed Merah, l'homme aux cent visages,” *Le Monde*, March 22, 2012; Gilles Souilles, “Mohammed Merah, Docteur Jeckyll et Mister Hyde,” *La Dépêche du Midi*, March 22, 2012.

¹² Borredon and Fallorou.

¹³ Cécile Deffontaines and Olivier Toscer, “Comment le contre-espionnage a égaré la fiche de Merah,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 18, 2012.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Borredon and Fallorou.

¹⁶ Isabelle Monnin, “Mohamed Merah: vie et mort d'un fanatique,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 3, 2012.

¹⁷ Deffontaines and Toscer.

Why did the police operation fail?

The failure to arrest Mohammed Merah during a surprise night raid and the subsequent media frenzied siege on his apartment also raised numerous questions. According to Claude Gueant, minister of the interior, the police's goal was to take Merah alive so he could face justice. Yet after a 32-hour siege and countless hours of negotiations, the police failed to erode Merah's will to resist or to convince him to surrender.¹⁸ As one Socialist deputy, Jerome Guedj, provocatively put it: "So if I understand correctly, in 30 hours, the RAID [Recherche Assistance Intervention Dissuasion] is unable to go pick up an individual alone in his apartment."¹⁹ Meanwhile, retired officials from the RAID and from the Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (GIGN, the Gendarmerie counterpart to the RAID) both questioned the tactics used in the raid to capture Merah.²⁰ Observers blamed the government for politicizing and micro managing the police operation.²¹

Legal, Organizational, and Political Fallout

For the time being, the fallout of Merah's attacks concerns the legal framework for combating terrorism and the role and missions of the DCRI. Despite the criticisms of its operation to capture Merah, the RAID is not the subject of reform proposals. Facing intense criticism, the government responded quickly with several initiatives.

First, the Ministry of Interior initiated a crackdown against radical Islamists. The government targeted Forsane Alizza, a small group known for calling for France's Islamization, preaching hate, and promoting Usama bin Ladin.²² Thirteen of the 17 people arrested remain in detention and charged with terrorism-related offenses. The group became known for fiery anti-French

¹⁸ "La stratégie du RAID: purger la dimension d'hyperviolence du suspect," FranceTV.fr, March 21, 2012.

¹⁹ "La polémique enfle sur l'assaut du RAID et l'enquête," *Libération*, March 22, 2012.

²⁰ "Toulouse: Le Fondateur du GIGN critique l'opération du RAID," *Ouest-France*, March 22, 2012.

²¹ Floran Vadillo, "Une opération policière trop politisée," *Le Monde*, March 29, 2012.

²² "Le coup de filet dans les milieux islamistes débouche sur 17 gardes à vue," *Libération*, March 30, 2012.

and anti-Western rants, provocative public demonstrations, and ambiguous incitement to violence. Under current legislation, the government accused the group of masterminding the kidnapping of a French judge. Coming in the aftermath of the attacks in Toulouse and Montauban, the arrests seem to indicate that the French government is intensifying its offensive against groups and individuals whose actions might incite others to commit violence and acts of terrorism.

Second, immediately following Merah's death, French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced two new legislative initiatives designed to strengthen the legal arsenal against would-be terrorists: one designed to curtail access to jihadist websites, and the other designed to criminalize traveling to "insurrectionary countries." Socialist candidate Francois Hollande indicated that he was favorable to a law dealing with the second problem. On April 4, the government released a draft new law that encompasses both problems.²³ The new proposed law is designed to curtail the promotion of terrorism. Key provisions include:

- regular surfing (without legitimate purpose) of or the promotion of jihadist websites would become a misdemeanor;
- glorification of terrorism on the internet would incur a seven-year prison sentence;
- the police would gain expanded power to shut down internet servers;
- instigating acts of terrorism would become a new misdemeanor under French law;
- the legal definition of "plotting in relation with a terroristic enterprise" is expanded to include those who travel abroad to attend ideological or military training camps.

It is likely that parliament will pass—possibly with some amendments—the proposed law, as a debate on the wisdom of the proposed rules might look like an effort to impede the government from doing what is necessary. How these new dispositions will impact counterterrorism efforts remains to be seen. The new law wades into a complicated territory—how

to regulate speech—even if took a prudent approach. The new law uses dispositions that have been deemed constitutional in other domains such as criminalizing the consultation of child pornography websites or the application of the principle of extra-territoriality that enables the French government to prosecute people who engage in sexual tourism abroad even if it is not illegal in the country where they committed the acts. It also finally includes a European directive criminalizing the instigation of a terrorist act into the French legal framework. It is not clear how effective such dispositions might be.

Meanwhile, the government quickly quelled the Socialist Party's effort to investigate the intelligence services in response to Merah's attacks. On March 31, the Socialist Party in the senate asked that the internal and external intelligence service chiefs, Erard Corbin de Mangoux and Bernard Squarcini, be questioned by a Senatorial Committee on Legal Affairs.²⁴ The request fulfilled the Socialist Party's quest for a greater parliament role in overseeing and controlling the intelligence services. Yet it also was an attempt to support candidate Francois Hollande's effort to conduct a full assessment of the antiterrorism laws and structures in France in the aftermath of the Merah incident. The government, seeing no reason to give grounds to the main opposition party, flatly refused, arguing that the two officers have no role in assessing antiterrorism laws and that, particularly amid a contentious presidential campaign, they are held to a strict obligation of confidentiality.²⁵

Besides adding legislation, Sarkozy's government does not appear inclined to modify the current structures and services. That could change if Francois Hollande, the Socialist candidate, wins the presidential run-off on May 6, 2012. At this time, the Socialist candidate is predicted to win. Before Merah's attacks, the Socialist Party was already planning a reform of the intelligence services. Details of this reform plan have not been publicized. It is, however,

²⁴ "Renseignements: L'aveu d'impuissance," *Le Monde*, March 31, 2012.

²⁵ Laurent Borredon, "Le gouvernement refuse l'audition des chefs du renseignement par les sénateurs," *Le Monde*, March 30, 2012.

known that the presumptive Socialist nominee for minister of interior, Francois Rebsamen, met with Bernard Squarcini in Paris to discuss the tenets of a reform of the intelligence services.²⁶ It is too soon to assess whether or how the most recent revelation on the lost Merah record during the fusion of the RG and the DST into the DCRI will affect the Socialist Party's plans.

After Mohammed Merah's killing spree, Francois Hollande gave a few clues as to where he wants to take the intelligence services. They hint at a broader reform than that envisioned by President Sarkozy. Hollande proposed to exert greater control on those who travel to "sensitive countries." It remains to be seen whether the proposed new legislation is enough for him. He also proposes to increase and improve coordination between the DGSE and the DCRI. Finally, he said that the services needed adequate funding to fully implement the painstaking work of monitoring and surveillance.

Pascale Combelles Siegel is President of Insight Through Analysis, a consultancy firm specializing in strategic communications, military-media, and civil-military relations research, analysis, planning, and assessment. Her work currently focuses on providing analytical support to cultural intelligence and counterterrorism/counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ms. Combelles Siegel has several monographs, chapters and sections in books and official studies. These include a solicited chapter in the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point's recent Making the Grade: Assessing al-Qa`ida's Learning and Adaptation, and Target Bosnia, a well-received study of NATO psychological operations and public affairs.

Boko Haram Escalates Attacks on Christians in Northern Nigeria

By David Cook

DURING THE PAST six months, Nigeria's Boko Haram extremist sect has continued to demonstrate the ability to execute attacks. It has both solidified its hold over the region of Maiduguri in Borno State, as well as expanded its operating area to include the major Muslim population centers of northern Nigeria.¹ To date, the Nigerian government seems incapable of responding to Boko Haram, and through a series of mistakes has revealed what outside observers have long suspected: certain elements of the security forces and political leaders of Muslim-majority northern Nigeria are either complicit with Boko Haram's operations, or they are taking a rather complacent view of its success.

The most significant changes to Boko Haram's operations have been a departure from high-profile operations with international implications—such as the suicide attack on the United Nations headquarters in Abuja on August 26, 2011—and an escalation of attacks on Nigerian Christians as well as a renewed focus on attacks against the Nigerian security apparatus (police and army).

Although Boko Haram's basic goal of creating a Shari'a state either in part or in the totality of Nigeria remains a constant, its methodology has changed slightly since the summer of 2011. This article looks at Boko Haram's increase in attacks on Christians, reviews its continued targeting of Nigerian security forces, and finally assesses the implications for the future.

Boko Haram Escalates Attacks on Christians

Starting with the major attacks in Damaturu in Yobe State on November 4, 2011 and the Christmas Day series of operations in 2011, Boko Haram's renewed focus on Christians is a departure from its previous operations,

which targeted Christians more at random and did not appear to be a priority for the group.

Boko Haram's new phase of attacks on Christians can be divided into several target categories: 1) attacks against local Christians in Boko Haram's core operating area of Borno and Yobe states, and the adjacent state of Bauchi; 2) major suicide operations or bombing attacks of high-profile churches in Jos in Plateau State and the capital of Abuja; and 3) minor operations against church or parachurch personnel throughout the north and "middle belt" regions of

"Although it is commonly discussed in the popular press, it is important not to assume that Boko Haram is about to transform into a transnational Salafi-jihadi group."

Nigeria. These operations represent a fairly major shift in the goals of Boko Haram, which are still squarely Nigeria-focused, and represent the opposition of certain elements of the Muslim north to the spread of Christianity in the region.²

Attacks on Christian targets in general are boundary-creating operations that can command a certain level of popular support within the Muslim community—or at least not generate the broad Muslim opposition that was seen when Salafi-jihadi groups in various countries targeted Muslim civilians beginning in 2003. The Salafi-jihadi groups that today are at the forefront of the movement targeting Christians (which remains peripheral to the much broader field of political radical Islam) such as al-Shabab in Somalia, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in North Africa, radical Muslims in southern Thailand, the Taliban in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and

¹ Nigeria is nearly equally divided between Muslims and Christians. Nigerian Muslims, who are primarily Sunni, are concentrated in the northern part of the country, while Christians dominate the Middle Belt and the south.

² The other angle, if one wants to avoid the religious component, is ethnic, where certain elements of the north oppose the spread of Igbo and other southern ethnic elements to the region. The author, however, does not believe that the ethnic angle applies in this context.

Indonesian radicals are achieving that prominence because they are returning to the pre-2003 formula of “defending Islam.” This trend is likely the wave of the immediate future, at least until these groups can establish themselves in a geographic base.

Boko Haram follows this paradigm. It emphasizes in its propaganda and operations two basic themes, both of which resonate with Nigerian Muslims: 1) the security forces are tools of the Christian-dominated government in Abuja, and are actively preventing the formation of a Shari`a state using brutal methods and attacking innocent, pious Muslims;³ and 2) the growth of Christianity through aggressive proselytizing will eventually disenfranchise Muslims (even in the Muslim-majority north) and render the creation of a Muslim state (or society) in the north either impossible or meaningless.⁴ While substantive proof that Boko Haram commands actual broad-based support among Muslims does not exist,⁵ the evidence of the past year confirms that these two messages do resonate with the broader Muslim population as long as Boko Haram does not itself kill large numbers of Muslim civilians.

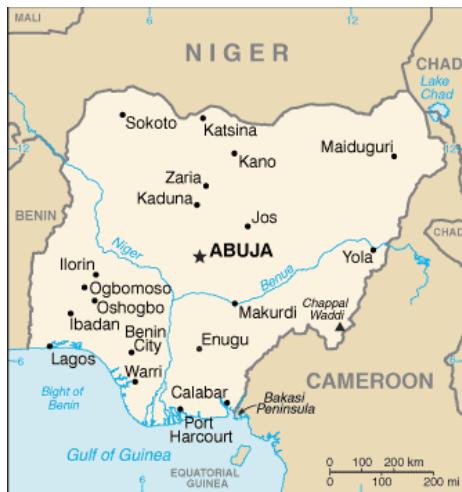
Boko Haram’s operations during the period of fall 2011 to spring 2012 began with the major series of suicide attacks, bombings and targeted murders in the Yobe state capital of Damaturu,⁶ which killed at least 100 people. These operations were clearly designed to expel Christians from northern mid-range towns. (Much of the Christian population of Maiduguri already fled the city during the previous period, fall 2010-spring 2011.) Anecdotally, it seems that the Damaturu and follow-up operations in the states bordering Boko Haram’s core region of Borno and Yobe have succeeded in causing the balance of the Christian population to flee.

³ Mark Lobel, “Kano Bombings: ‘Extra-Judicial’ Killings Spark Nigeria Fury,” BBC, February 2, 2012.

⁴ “Boko Haram: Nigerian Islamist Leader Defends Attacks,” BBC, January 11, 2012. Synthesis of statements by Abubakar Shekau from YouTube.

⁵ “Emir Of Kano Weeps Over Boko Haram Attacks – Premium Times,” *African Spotlight*, January 23, 2012.

⁶ “Violence in Yobe State, Nigeria Aimed Mainly at Christians,” Compass Direct News, November 11, 2011.



A map of Nigeria. The country is largely equally divided between the Muslim-majority north, and the Christian-majority south.

The next series of operations focused on Jos and Abuja, both cities with a substantial expatriate population and good media coverage. These attacks occurred on Christmas Day 2011, again a symbolic date guaranteed to make headlines.⁷ These operations used suicide attacks against churches and killed at least 25 people. It is a mystery as to why this attack came as a surprise given that Boko Haram had previously executed spectacular attacks on Christian targets on Christmas Day in 2010. In Jos and Abuja, however, in contradistinction to the Damaturu attacks (and others in the northeast), the Christian population is quite strong—even at a majority level—and therefore there is no chance that Boko Haram, lacking broader military options, can do anything other than provoke terror. There have also been major thematic attacks on Christian targets on January 5, 6, 10, 11, 24 (all in either Maiduguri, Adamawa or Jos), February 19 (Suleja, near Abuja), and February 25, 2012 (Abuja and Jos), of which the Jos attack was a suicide bombing.⁸

Boko Haram has managed to take a semi-dysfunctional society lacking basic security and the rule of law and drive it into a complete state of dysfunction where the only obvious means by which order can be re-established

⁷ “Deadly Nigeria Bomb Attacks Condemned by World Leaders,” BBC, December 25, 2011.

⁸ Mindy Belz, “Targeted Christians,” *WORLD Magazine*, February 29, 2012.

is through draconian state-security methods (akin to Algeria in the 1990s) or by acceding to the group’s demands. The latter option would indeed cause a civil war, as the Christians through fall 2011 and spring 2012 have become increasingly impatient with the lack of tangible governmental progress against Boko Haram. There is a strong danger of revenge attacks by Christians on a local *ad hoc* basis,⁹ or even worse the creation of an equivalent vigilante group that could mirror Boko Haram’s tactics.

Continued Targeting of Nigerian Security Forces

The most spectacular series of attacks carried out during the recent period was the January 21, 2012, operations against police and military targets in the major northern Muslim city of Kano, which killed at least 186 people.¹⁰ This operation was spectacular not only for its high casualty count, but the complex nature of attacks upon no less than three different police targets, a prison break and approximately 12 car bombs either exploding around the city or found unexploded. Although this incident was grander in nature than previous attacks, it was no different in kind than past Boko Haram attacks against security targets throughout 2010-2011. It was followed by a brazen suicide bombing against the armed forces General Headquarters in Kaduna on February 9, considered to be the Nigerian equivalent of the U.S. Army’s West Point. Although this operation failed to actually penetrate the base, the mere fact that it was attempted, and in Kaduna (at the center of the country), has been a major propaganda victory for Boko Haram. There have also been a number of attacks against schools, hospitals, markets and other public locations (including sports events), primarily in Maiduguri. All of these latter attacks fall under Boko Haram’s rubric of attacks involving *al-amr bi-l-ma`ruf wa-l-nahi `an al-munkar* (enjoining the good and forbidding the evil)—such operations are typically directed against non-Islamic practices, such as the consumption of alcohol.

⁹ “Nigeria Unrest: Mosque Attacked in Benin City,” BBC, January 10, 2012; Jon Gambrell and Njadvara Musa, “Nigeria Sect Kills 15; Christians Vow Defense,” Associated Press, January 7, 2012.

¹⁰ “Kano Attack: Emir Leads Prayers in Nigerian City,” BBC, January 23, 2012.

It is important to recognize that while Boko Haram has expanded its field of targets through the Kano attacks by moving away from its base in northeastern Nigeria and its usual range of targets in the center, it has yet to move beyond this core region or strike at any of the major cities of the northwest or the Christian south. Moreover, to counter the U.S. congressional report on Nigeria in December 2011, Boko Haram does not present any threat thus far beyond the borders of Nigeria.¹¹

Implications for the Future

As Nigerian reporters have speculated, it appears that Boko Haram has several interlocking elements at the present time. One is most probably centered around the figure of Abubakr Shekau, who represents the most doctrinally Salafi-jihadi section of the group. It is to him that one can attribute the most doctrinaire statements, such as his January 28, 2012, release threatening Muslims who do not fully observe Shari'a: "There are no exceptions. Even if you are a Muslim and you can't abide by Shari'a we will kill you. Even if you are my own father, we will kill you."¹² It is tempting to see attacks such as the January 21 incident in Kano as the work of this faction of Boko Haram (since they represent a type of revenge for Muhammad Yusuf, the murdered charismatic founder of Boko Haram), while attacks against Christians are perhaps farmed out to other sections of the group.¹³

Nigerian journalists have speculated that the group now exists on a franchise basis, and that some attacks on Christians, murderous as they are, represent local grievances. Of course, it is possible that a number of driving factors could be at play in the anti-Christian attacks. It is interesting that there is also no evidence of Muslim clerics joining Boko Haram; indeed, the group has continued to kill its religious opponents, such as on February 18 in Maiduguri. In the author's analysis, the

scale of all of these attacks indicates that Boko Haram must consist of several thousand hard-core members and sympathizers.¹⁴

To date, the Nigerian government has not demonstrated the ability to contain Boko Haram,¹⁵ and strong evidence that the group has been curtailed by any of the measures taken by the government does not exist. There is also no evidence that Boko Haram is making the transition to a more broad-based jihadist group (a transition that is usually marked by the creation of a countersociety), nor has it succeeded in gathering mass support. Indeed, Boko Haram could very well have alienated Muslim public opinion by some of its indiscriminate killings. Although it is commonly discussed in the popular press, it is important not to assume that Boko Haram is about to transform into a transnational Salafi-jihadi group. The public evidence that Boko Haram actually has ties to the Somalia-based al-Shabab or with North Africa's AQIM is weak. With the sole exception of the attack upon the UN headquarters in Abuja, there are no attacks carried out by Boko Haram thus far that cannot be explained within the context of a local jihadist group, with a Salafist leadership, seeking to establish a Shari'a state over part or all of Nigeria.

Dr. David Cook is associate professor of religious studies at Rice University. He completed his undergraduate degrees at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 2001. His first book, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, was published by Darwin Press in the series Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam. Two further books, Understanding Jihad and Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature were published during 2005, and Martyrdom in Islam as well as Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks (with Olivia Allison) have been completed recently.

¹¹ "US Congress Warns of Nigeria's Boko Haram," BBC, December 1, 2011.

¹² Monica Mark, "Boko Haram Vows to Fight until Nigeria Establishes Sharia Law," *Guardian*, January 27, 2012; "Shekau Leading Boko Haram From the Shadows," Agence France-Presse, January 28, 2012.

¹³ Yusuf Alli, "Kabiru Sokoto Gives SSS Clues on Sect's Leaders," *The Nation*, February 13, 2012.

Revisiting Shaykh Atiyyatullah's Works on Takfir and Mass Violence

By Christopher Anzalone

IN THE EIGHTH installment of his series of messages on post-Mubarak Egypt, al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri finally confirmed the killing of one of the organization's senior ideologues and reputed operations chief in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan on August 22, 2011.¹ Jamal Ibrahim Ishtaywi al-Misrati, better known by his *nom-de-guerre* "Shaykh Atiyyatullah," was one of al-Qa`ida central's most versatile leaders and a longtime veteran of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).² Among his most significant contributions to Sunni jihadist thought was his participation in intra-jihadist debates on the issue of *takfir* (excommunication), the practice of declaring another Muslim an apostate. These debates have proven to be both bitter and long-lasting, pitting those Sunni jihadists who argue for a broad use of *takfir* on any perceived enemy against those who argue for a more restrictive and cautious implementation.

Atiyyatullah argued for the latter, even intervening in a debate with the late founder and leader of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, over the mass targeting of Iraqi Shi`a Muslims and even Sunni Muslims who did not support AQI. Atiyyatullah's caution about the use of *takfir* was likely tied to his experiences in Algeria during the 1990s, when he was an LIFG emissary to the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

This article examines Atiyyatullah's position on *takfir* and how it fits into the broader intra-jihadist debate on excommunicating and using violence against other Muslims. Atiyyatullah's efforts to regulate the use of *takfir* and violence, particularly after the Iraq debacle, were one of the most pragmatic

¹ Ayman al-Zawahiri, "A Message of Hope and Glad Tidings for our People in Egypt: Part 8," December 2, 2011, available on various jihadist web forums.

² Atiyyatullah was also known as Abu Abd al-Rahman Atiyatullah al-Libi and Atiyah Abd al-Rahman. It is believed he was also the writer of a December 2005 letter from a senior al-Qa`ida central ideologue to Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi. That letter was signed simply as "Atiyah."

attempts at intervention in this debate. His continued cautioning of jihadists to not misuse or misapply *takfir* and violence serves as an unintended confirmation that these were continuing problems among them, belying his attempts to deflect the allegations. Even in death, Atiyyatullah continues to serve as a charismatic voice for al-Qa`ida central and its allies, with the posthumous publication of writings and audio messages and citation of his previous work by al-Qa`ida central, its allies such as al-Shabab in Somalia, and “cyber” jihadists.

Encountering Extreme Takfir in Algeria

Atiyyatullah began his career in the 1980s as a member of a large contingent of Libyans, many of whom would later form the LIFG, a group that was for much of its existence dedicated to the overthrow of the regime of Libyan dictator Mu`ammar Qadhafi. Few details are known about his early days in the LIFG, although he traveled to Afghanistan in the late 1980s with a contingent of other Libyans for military training.³ In 1992, following the Soviet withdrawal from the country and the beginning of a brutal civil war between Afghan mujahidin factions, the hundreds of LIFG members began to return to Libya to start the fight against Qadhafi.⁴ During the 1990s, the period when it had a major presence in Afghanistan, the LIFG had close relations with al-Qa`ida before the core organization became affiliated with other groups in North Africa, Yemen, Iraq, and Somalia. Atiyyatullah was an early al-Qa`ida recruit.⁵

Following its return to Libya, the LIFG attempted to aid the GIA in its insurgency against the Algerian government. The GIA’s ideology, however, became increasingly extreme throughout the 1990s and it began to commit massacres of both its enemies in the Algerian government and security forces, as well as Algerian civilians who it deemed as “apostates” because they,

the group’s leadership determined, failed to actively support the GIA.⁶ The GIA’s brutal violence was eventually condemned by even its staunchest supporters, including Abu Qatada al-Filistini, who provided legal opinions (*fatawa*) from the United Kingdom that legitimized the GIA’s violence throughout much of the 1990s.⁷ In the mid-1990s, Atiyyatullah and other Libyan jihadists traveled as part of a delegation of LIFG and al-Qa`ida members to the GIA to inquire about the status of missing LIFG fighters who had earlier traveled to Algeria.⁸ Atiyyatullah’s experiences in Algeria, including a period when he was held captive by the GIA, likely influenced his views on *takfir* and the employment of mass violence against other Muslims, two issues on which he later addressed repeatedly in his writings and audio and video statements.

Intra-Jihadist Debates on Takfir

The related issues of *takfir* and the use of mass violence by jihadists against other Muslims has been the subject of intense debate among Sunni jihadists for decades.⁹ Can large groups of people, even entire societies, be classified as apostates for either their support of the irreligious “tyrants” of the Muslim world or their acquiescence to their rule and failure to support jihadists fighting them? Which groups can be the legitimate target of *takfir*? What makes an individual who claims to be a Muslim abandon their faith and become an apostate? These questions are at the forefront of this debate.

In 2004-2006, the *takfir* discussion returned to the fore with the beginning of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi’s campaign of mass violence against Iraqi Shi`a and others who he deemed to be apostates because of either their support or participation in the new Iraqi government or their failure, in his view, of adequately supporting AQI. This led to an exchange between al-Zarqawi and al-Qa`ida central’s leaders, including second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Yahya al-Libi, and Atiyyatullah. Al-Zarqawi was also criticized by his former teacher, the prominent jihadist scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, which led to the late AQI leader’s supporters to turn on the latter. Atiyyatullah entered the back-and-forth debate between al-Zarqawi and his critics with a December 11, 2005, letter addressed to the AQI leader.¹⁰ He warned al-Zarqawi against casting a negative light on the Iraqi insurgency through his actions and noted that jihadists’ military decisions must be subservient to the “judicious Shari`a,” which lays out specific guidelines for behavior that even the mujahidin must follow. Reminding al-Zarqawi of the catastrophic missteps of the GIA in Algeria, Atiyyatullah urged the AQI leader to be cautious in his use of *takfir*, warned him against severe criticism of Iraqi Sunnis and those religious scholars (*`ulama*) who are righteous, even if they make errors, and instructed him to send emissaries to al-Qa`ida central’s bases in Pakistan to enter into consultation with the core organization.¹¹

Atiyyatullah on Takfir, its Restrictions, and Mass Violence against Muslims

The debate over the legitimate use of violence remained a key interest of Atiyyatullah’s until his death, and he continually urged jihadists to exercise caution with regard to the use of *takfir* and mass violence against Muslims. Specifically, he sought to delineate the boundaries and limitations of what he considered legitimate violence in light

³ Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: The Story of Al-Qa`ida and the Arab Jihadists* (London: Saqi Books, 2011), p. 51.

⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵ Ian Black, “The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group—From Al-Qaida to the Arab Spring,” *Guardian*, September 5, 2011; “Libyan Islamic Fighting Group,” in “Al-Qaida Sanctions List: Narrative Summaries,” United Nations, undated.

⁶ For an overview of the development of the GIA and the group’s increasingly broad use of *takfir* against even Algerian civilians who did not support the group, see Mohammed M. Hafez, “Armed Islamist Movements and Political Violence in Algeria,” *Middle East Journal* 54:4 (2000): pp. 572-591.

⁷ Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus`ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 188-189; Brynjar Lia, “Destructive Doctrinarians: Abu Mus`ab al-Suri’s Critique of the Salafis in the Jihadi Current,” in Roel Meijer ed., *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 292-293.

⁸ Tawil, p. 87.

⁹ Mohammed M. Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres: A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria,” in Quintan Wiktorowicz ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 52.

¹⁰ The letter was signed simply “Atiyah,” but it is believed that Atiyyatullah was its author. See “Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qa`ida High Command,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, September 25, 2006; Karen DeYoung, “Letter Gives Glimpse of Al-Qaeda’s Leadership,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 2006. ¹¹ Atiyyatullah, “Letter to Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi,” December 11, 2005.

of his interpretation of Islamic law. He also used his public position on *takfir* and violence to defend al-Qa`ida central and its allies from allegations that it carries out attacks targeting Muslim civilians. Thus, his seemingly principled stances on *takfir* and against mass violence had a key strategic goal: defending the transnational Sunni jihadist current, with al-Qa`ida central at its helm, from damaging charges that it perpetrates lethal attacks on Muslims.

Atiyyatullah further elucidated his views on *takfir* following an October 2009 car bombing that ripped through the Mina Bazaar in Peshawar, killing 137 people. The Pakistani and U.S. governments blamed Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and al-Qa`ida central for being behind the attack, but both groups issued quick denials and condemnations.¹² The TTP and al-Qa`ida central launched a coordinated media blitz to both deny responsibility for the Mina Bazaar attack and other bombings in civilian areas carried out in late 2009.

In the midst of this media campaign, an 18-page question-and-answer booklet was issued to jihadist internet forums by the al-Fajr Media Center, the shadowy online distributor of al-Qa`ida media materials. Entitled “Advice and Compassion Regarding the Bombings in the Markets: Question and Answer concerning the Bombings of the Peshawar Markets,” the booklet was composed of Atiyyatullah’s responses to a number of questions regarding bombings, *takfir*, and the use of mass violence against Muslims.¹³ Asked about whether it was permissible to “rejoice and celebrate” the bombings because they had killed many people who had “serious shortcoming in religious affairs, thought only of their worldly life, refrained from jihad, deserted the mujahidin, and lived contentedly under the authority of an apostate government,” he responded strongly in the negative, saying: “Rather, the religious obligation is that one objects to them [these types

of attacks on Muslims] and believes that they are a forum of spreading corruption, falsehood, oppression, and transgression and are contrary to the pure religion of Islam.” Furthermore, the bombings could not have been carried out by jihadists because Islamic fighters follow Shari`a, which prohibits such attacks. Using hadith to illustrate his point, Atiyyatullah said that those who disregard the prohibition of spilling Muslim blood “without regard” are akin to the tyrannical rulers of disbelief (*kufir*), degenerate and unrepentant sinners, and the Khawarij, an extremist sect that emerged in the seventh century in opposition to both the Umayyads and the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib.¹⁴

Atiyyatullah reiterated his caution against the incorrect implementation of *takfir* and discussed its restrictions in a second question-and-answer booklet called, “Responses to the Ruling on Leaving for Battle and the Precondition of Takfir,” which was released on August 1, 2010. The judgment of *takfir* against a specific individual, he stated, is restricted to those knowledgeable in religion, such as `ulama, and is prohibited to all Muslims who do not have “access to [religious] knowledge (*ilm*).” Muslim laity are required to ask a qualified religious scholar if asked about whether a specific individual has become an apostate. Both `ulama and the laity, however, are sometimes capable of recognizing the unbelief of some groups such as those who are not Muslim or those who openly declare their apostasy. Overt signs of apostasy, he said, include cursing God, the Prophet Muhammad, or Islam as a religion, and those who express disbelief and ridicule of them. It is the `ulama, however, who should determine what is classified as serious cursing or mockery.¹⁵ In his response, Atiyyatullah sought to place clear restrictions as to who was qualified to determine whether an individual Muslim had become an apostate and thus lessen the chances of a repeat of the GIA’s bloodletting in Algeria.

Jihadists must “abide by the guidelines of God’s law,” which forbids the unlawful killing of people regardless of “the extent of the enemy’s transgression and despotism.” They must seek “the success of earning God’s approval” because this is the loftiest goal. For this reason, jihadists do not engage in violence against Muslims or the innocent, Atiyyatullah argued again in March 2011. “Our legal (*shari*) and blessed jihad is one that has lofty and noble goals, which have the qualities of justice, mercy, goodness, nobility, honor, respect, reform, and success,” he concluded. “We remind our brothers, the mujahidin, everywhere of the importance of emphasizing and spreading knowledge about the importance of the sanctity of the Muslims’ blood and the obligation to take great precautions to protect and preserve it.”¹⁶ Atiyyatullah even cautioned against wanton, retaliatory bloodletting against those who worked for the Qadhafi regime, instead urging Libyan rebels to “keep forgiveness and tolerance at the forefront when dealing with those people who erred and committed the evil of following certain [political] trends and making incorrect decisions previously [of backing tyrannical Arab regimes],” and call on them to “make true repentance.”¹⁷ His pragmatism in embracing and attempting to “advise” the popular uprisings in his home country, Tunisia, and Egypt was also marked by prioritizing grassroots missionary work (*da`wa*) over the forcible implementation of Shari`a, as interpreted by jihadists.¹⁸

Conclusion

Atiyyatullah’s career as a major al-Qa`ida ideologue was marked by pragmatism, particularly with regard to the legitimate use of *takfir*. He cautioned jihadists, including the renowned battlefield commander Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi at the height of his popularity in transnational jihadist circles, against the use of mass violence and wanton *takfir*. As he wrote to the AQI leader,

¹² “Taliban Denies Peshawar Blast Role,” al-Jazira, October 29, 2009.

¹³ Atiyyatullah, “Advice and Compassion Regarding the Bombings in the Markets: Question and Answer concerning the Bombings of the Peshawar Markets,” January 21, 2010.

¹⁶ Atiyyatullah, “Maximizing the Sanctity of the Muslims’ Blood,” March 13, 2011.

¹⁷ Atiyyatullah, “Tribute to Our People in Libya,” March 17, 2011.

¹⁸ Atiyyatullah, “The People’s Revolution and the Fall of the Corrupt Arab Regime: The Demolishment of the Idol of Stability and the New Beginning,” February 23, 2011.

military decisions must be subordinate to jihadists' strategic and political goals. Atiyatullah used his opposition to the overly broad, careless use of *takfir* to defend jihadists against charges that they engaged in illegitimate violence against innocent Muslims, arguing that because they were fighting "for Shari'a" they could not logically contravene it by perpetrating such attacks. His pragmatic approach toward *takfir* further manifested itself in his response to the outbreak of popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya in the winter of 2011-2012 and spring of 2012. Rather than sternly lecturing the people of these countries about their duty to immediately implement religious legal codes, as al-Zawahiri has done, Atiyatullah congratulated the people while gently but firmly advising them to work toward the implementation of an "Islamic state." The key to doing this, he wrote, was through *da`wa* rather than force, an argument mirroring that of the late Yemeni-American preacher Anwar al-'Awlaqi.¹⁹

The posthumous publication of new material by Atiyatullah and the citation of his works by al-Qa`ida central and its regional affiliates as well as online jihadists show that this dynamic Libyan battlefield scholar-ideologue remains influential even after death and further highlights the ideological blow inflicted by his killing. In addition to his important role in al-Qa`ida central's media messaging campaign and operational aspects, he was also one of the group's last remaining members of the "old guard." This fact, coupled with the unusual way in which he was built up as a top-tier ideologue, means that he is likely irreplaceable.

Christopher Anzalone is a doctoral student in the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University where he studies modern Muslim socio-political movements including transnational jihadi groups, Shi`ite Islam, and Islamist visual culture.

¹⁹ Anwar al-'Awlaqi, "The Tsunami of Change," *Inspire*, March 30, 2011; Christopher Anzalone and Bruno-Olivier Bureau, "Death of an Ideologue," The AfPak Channel, October 21, 2011.

Mangal Bagh and LI Marginalized in Khyber Agency

By Daud Khattak

PAKISTAN'S KHYBER AGENCY has long been a stronghold for the militant group Lashkar-i-Islam (LI) and its leader, Mangal Bagh. Multiple operations launched by Pakistan's military in Khyber failed to dislodge LI from its safe haven in the Bara area, which is located just 12 miles from Pakistan's northern city of Peshawar.¹ Although Mangal Bagh and LI had to contend with a number of competing militia groups in Khyber, by 2007 his group had emerged as the most powerful in the agency, recruiting young men into its ranks, forcing civilians to grow their beards, barring women from markets, banning music and imposing taxes on wealthy locals and minorities.² LI's consolidation of power came after a rival militia, Qazi Mahboob's Ansar-ul-Islam (AI),³ fled into the remote Tirah Valley after months of clashes with LI,⁴ and after another rival leader, Haji Namdar Khan of the Taliban-style Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (AMNAM) group,⁵ was reportedly assassinated by militants from Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Yet in April 2011, a group of locals from the Zakhakhel sub-tribe⁶ in the Tirah Valley formed a militia and demanded that LI leave the area. Shortly after the demand, armed clashes occurred between Zakhakhel tribesmen and LI members, with both sides suffering casualties. The Zakhakhel tribesmen eventually named their militia Tawheedul Islam (TI), and they continued to attack LI throughout 2011. By November 2011, the Zakhakhel succeeded in pushing LI out of the Bara area of Khyber.

The situation in Khyber is a pertinent example of how quickly militant groups operating in the tribal areas can fall out of favor. This article discusses the emergence of TI and reviews how the group managed to defeat LI in Khyber Agency. It then assesses the current strength of LI in light of its recent losses.

The Emergence of Tawheedul Islam

One of LI's key support bases in the strategic Tirah Valley was the Zakhakhel sub-tribe. Members of the Zakhakhel comprised a significant portion of LI's ranks. Yet in April 2011, a group of the Zakhakhel revolted against LI chief Mangal Bagh. Key Zakhakhel commanders, such as Tayyab and Ghuncha Gul, deserted Mangal Bagh following a monetary dispute.⁷ In addition to this disagreement, another incident further alienated the Zakhakhel from LI. In March 2011, LI kidnapped and killed Zakhakhel tribesman and religious leader Maulana Hasham on the belief that he was conspiring against the group.⁸ Zakhakhel tribesmen demanded that Mangal Bagh punish Hasham's killers, yet he reportedly refused. At the same time, Ghuncha Gul, who defected from LI, was captured by Mangal Bagh's forces. As a result of these incidents, Zakhakhel youth took up arms against LI, which caused a number of LI's Zakhakhel members to leave the organization and join their tribal compatriots in TI.

¹ Khyber Agency has three sub-districts: Bara, located southeast of Peshawar; Jamrud, located east of Peshawar; and Landi Kotal, located further east of Jamrud and sharing the border with Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province at the Torkham border crossing.

² Hundreds of Sikh families are living in the Bara and Tirah areas of Khyber and parts of neighboring Orakzai Agency. The Sikh families were living in peace with the tribesmen until the emergence of Taliban-affiliated militants in those areas.

³ Ansar-ul-Islam follows the Barelvi sect, which places emphasis on mystical Islam and supports listening to music and visiting the shrines of saints. LI, on the other hand, is Deobandi and opposes music and the worship of saints or visits to shrines.

⁴ Ghafar Ali, "Mufti and Pir's Supporters Fight it Out: Five Dead," *Daily Times*, March 28, 2006.

⁵ "Pakistan Militant Leader Killed," BBC, August 13, 2008.

⁶ The Zakhakhel are one of the eight sub-tribes of the Afridi tribe living in Khyber Agency. The other seven sub-tribes are: Adamkhel, Kamarkhel, Qambarkhel, Kookikhel, Malak Dinkhel, Akakhel and Sipah.

⁷ Personal interview, Sajid Ali, journalist based in Jamrud, April 12, 2012.

⁸ Manzoor Ali, "Militancy: Mangal Bagh Loosens Grip over Khyber Agency," *Express Tribune*, April 4, 2011.

With the formation of the TI militia, the Zakhakhel tribesmen engaged in numerous clashes with LI in the Bazaar Zakhakhel area, located near the town of Landi Kotal and a key entry point to the Tirah Valley. By November 2011, TI, with the support of the local political administration, largely succeeded in expelling LI from the Zakhakhel tribal areas.⁹ Today, TI maintains security in the Bazaar Zakhakhel area of Khyber, preventing the return of LI.

Although TI could be considered a *lashkar* (tribal militia), they prefer not to identify themselves as such.¹⁰ *Lashkars* are generally considered anti-Taliban, and Taliban factions are known to target any newly-formed *lashkar*. The Zakhakhel who comprise TI have no enmity with

"The recent developments in Khyber Agency, particularly the stiff resistance from the Zakhakhel, Akakhel and Kookikhel sub-tribes, have marked at least the temporary end of Mangal Bagh's reign."

the Taliban in general or with other militant groups active in the area. Their only aim is to prevent Mangal Bagh and LI from gaining access to Zakhakhel areas.¹¹ Therefore, they likely choose to downplay the fact that they are a tribal militia out of fear of reprisal attacks.

TI is estimated to have 300-350 members.¹² Under tribal traditions, each family among the Zakhakhel is required to send one person as a volunteer to the militia. TI also receives support from the political administration in the area, from which it has received weapons,

9 Personal interview, Sudhir Afridi, journalist based in Landi Kotal, April 13, 2012.

10 Local journalist Farhad Shinwari was threatened for calling Tawheedul Islam a *lashkar* in his radio report.

11 Personal interview, Shirin, Tawheedul Islam commander, March 12, 2012.

12 Personal interview, Sudhir Afridi, journalist based in Landi Kotal, April 13, 2012; personal interview, Sajid Ali, journalist based in Jamrud, April 12, 2012.

ammunition, trucks and money. Nevertheless, in their fight against LI, TI did not receive any direct combat help from Pakistan's military.¹³

TI also receives income from smuggling goods to and from Afghanistan, such as spare automobile parts, imported fabrics and food.¹⁴ This same smuggling route through Khyber was previously used by LI, from which it earned thousands of dollars daily. Indeed, it was the issue of how to divide the profits that caused the original split between LI and the Zakhakhel in early 2011.

The Current Status of Lashkar-i-Islam

Once the strongest militant group in Khyber Agency's Bara area as well as in the Tirah region, LI's operating space has been reduced dramatically in the past two years. Although there are several causes for this weakness, the key factor has been the desertion of the Zakhakhel from its ranks and the formation of the rival TI. Two other sub-tribes in Khyber, the Kookikhel and Akakhel, have also organized *lashkars* to keep their areas secured from LI and other militant outfits.

As a result, LI has been largely restricted to the Naray Baba, Sandapal and a few other areas of the Tirah Valley.¹⁵ LI mainly draws support from the Sipah (Mangal Bagh's own tribe), Malak Dinkhel, Kamarkhel and Shlobar sub-tribes, which are providing its volunteers a safe route to move back and forth between the Tirah Valley and the Bara region. As a result of the recent phase of Pakistani military operations, the increasing attacks on LI from the TTP's Geedar Group¹⁶ (also known as

13 Personal interview, Major Fazal, spokesman for the paramilitary Frontier Corps, April 13, 2012.

14 This information was acquired from an interview with a local elder in the Landi Kotal area who wished to remain anonymous.

15 Personal interview, Brigadier (retired) Mahmood Shah, former secretary of security for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, April 13, 2012.

16 The Geedar Group is led by Taliban commander Tariq Afridi. Tariq Afridi belongs to the Geedar village in the semi-tribal Darra Adamkhel town, which borders Bara of Khyber Agency in the east, Peshawar in the north and Kohat city in the south. The exact reason for the differences between Mangal Bagh and the Geedar Group is not known, but Tariq Afridi wants bases for his group in the Bara region of Khyber, while Mangal Bagh opposes their presence. It has become a war of survival. If Tariq Afridi

TTP Darra Adamkhel chapter) and the strength of the Zakhakhel sub-tribe, many of Mangal Bagh's members reportedly trimmed their beards and fled to cities to start a civilian life.¹⁷ Today, the number of core volunteers of Mangal Bagh's LI likely does not exceed 300, yet he could probably call upon a few thousand more from allied tribes if necessary.¹⁸

LI's primary revenue sources were previously the control of smuggling routes to and from Afghanistan, kidnap-for-ransom operations, and the

"TI also receives income from smuggling goods to and from Afghanistan, such as spare automobile parts, imported fabrics and food."

forceful collection of taxes from wealthy tribesmen, including Khyber-based parliamentarians, as well as locals. Since the rise of TI, however, the smuggling routes have been closed to LI, denting its revenue stream dramatically.¹⁹

The kidnap-for-ransom business has also been squeezed with the shrinking of LI's sphere of influence and closure of roads. When LI used Bara as its base camp, it was easy for the group to kidnap people in Peshawar and then shift them to the safety of Bara or Tirah. This is no longer possible due to the success of TI. Moreover, the presence of army troops in Bara has forced Bagh's members to take refuge in the Sipah and Shlobar areas of the Tirah Valley where movement to and from Peshawar is difficult if not impossible.²⁰ As for

establishes himself in Bara, it would mean the loosening of Mangal Bagh's grip on the area.

17 Personal interview, Ibrahim Shinwari, local journalist, March 30, 2012.

18 Personal interview, Brigadier (retired) Mahmood Shah, former secretary of security for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, April 13, 2012.

19 Personal interview, Shirin, Zakhakhel commander, April 12, 2012.

20 The road from Peshawar to the Sipah and Shlobar areas in Tirah passes through Bara. The Bara area now has a number of army checkpoints, making movement

extortion, this revenue stream has also been constrained. The majority of locals in the region have vacated their homes as a result of the Pakistani military's ongoing operations, and they have moved to Peshawar or the Jalozai internally displaced persons camp.²¹

Mangal Bagh's current whereabouts are unknown. In March 2012, there was speculation that he may have been killed while fighting rival militias in the Tirah Valley.²² Yet officials from KP have been unable to confirm the report, and a spokesman from LI said that Mangal Bagh is still alive. Other reports suggest that Mangal Bagh and his key commanders fled to Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province.²³ Yet the provincial government of KP, as well as Pakistani military officials, has no information about these reports.²⁴

Conclusion

The recent developments in Khyber Agency, particularly the stiff resistance from the Zakhakhel, Akakhel and Kookikhel sub-tribes, have marked at least the temporary end of Mangal Bagh's reign. The actions of the sub-tribes have allowed Pakistan's security forces to more vigorously pursue LI in the Tirah Valley, where the presence of government-friendly militias such as Tawheedul Islam and Ansar-ul-Islam are providing support to the security forces.

While the weakness in LI is encouraging, the emergence of TI as another powerful armed group is beginning to concern locals. TI members, with their long hair, beards and heavy weapons, are regularly visiting the Lwargi and Landi Kotal towns in their pick-up trucks. Civilians are starting to see TI as a harbinger of trouble to come.²⁵

difficult for LI.

²¹ Personal interview, Sajid Ali, journalist based in Jamrud, April 13, 2012.

²² "Mangal Bagh Killed?" *The Nation*, March 20, 2012.

²³ Personal interview, Aqeel Yousufzai, expert based in Peshawar, March 31, 2012.

²⁴ Personal interview, Major Fazal, spokesman for the paramilitary Frontier Corps, April 13, 2012.

²⁵ Personal interview, Farhad Shinwari, journalist based in Landi Kotal, April 13, 2012; personal interviews, local civilians in Landi Kotal, April 13, 2012.

Similarly, the formation of *lashkars* by different sub-tribes such as the Akakhel, Kookikhel and Zakhakhel can easily spark a tribal war, particularly when the sub-tribes often quarrel on issues such as ownership of forests, mountains, roadways, and water channels.

It is the Pakistani government's responsibility to restore the people's trust in the state. This outcome is only possible when the state security forces take measures to eliminate all armed militias, not just those that are against the government. Selective measures on the part of the security forces may create short-term peace, but the history of the tribal areas shows that a friendly militia one day becomes a hostile one in the future.

Daud Khattak is Senior Editor with RFE/RL's Mashaal Radio in Prague, Czech Republic. Besides working in Afghanistan as Editor at Pajhwok Afghan News from 2005-2008, Mr. Khattak worked with Pakistani English daily newspapers covering the situation in KP and FATA. He also worked for Sunday Times London and contributed articles to the Christian Science Monitor. In 2010, his paper on the situation in Swat, "The Battle for Pakistan: Swat Valley," was published by the New America Foundation.

Militants Turn Against Pakistan's JUI-F Islamist Party

By Zia Ur Rehman

JAMIAT-I-ULAMA-I-ISLAM-FAZLUR (JUI-F) is one of the leading Islamist political parties in Pakistan. The JUI-F is considered ideologically similar to the Taliban, and the party is popular in northwest Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Yet in the past four years, several activists and leaders of the JUI-F have been targeted and killed in KP and FATA by unidentified Islamist militants. Even the JUI-F's right-wing leader, Maulana Fazlur Rahman, has been targeted in two failed assassination attempts.¹

Although no group has claimed credit for the attacks, analysts believe that the operations have been executed by irreconcilable Pakistani militant groups that disapprove of the JUI-F's "appeasement" policies. These include the JUI-F's decision to support the present ruling coalition in Islamabad, which is carrying out military operations against Pakistani Taliban groups in FATA,² as well as the party's reported attempts to engage the United States on peace talks for the war in Afghanistan.³

Attacks against the JUI-F can be dated to 2008, when the JUI-F became part of Pakistan's coalition government after participating in the country's general elections. The JUI-F took control of three federal ministries as part of the coalition. By partaking in democracy, the JUI-F appears to have turned its former patrons in the Pakistani Taliban into enemies.

This article profiles the JUI-F and examines the party's ties to Pakistani and Afghan Taliban factions. It also explains why Taliban factions have turned against a party that, to outside observers, appeared to be an ally.

¹ Javed Aziz Khan, "March 31 Charsadda Attack," *The News International*, April 2, 2011.

² Manzoor Ali and Qaiser Butt, "Charsadda Strike: Second Target Attack on Maulana Fazlur Rehman," *Express Tribune*, April 1, 2011.

³ "Wikileak: Fazlur Rehman's Votes Were 'Up to Sale,'" *Express Tribune*, June 1, 2011.

A Profile of JUI-F

The JUI-F, led by Maulana Fazlur Rahman, is Pakistan's leading religious political party. It follows the Deobandi movement within Sunni Islam, and it is the most influential organization in Pakistan calling for a "pure Islamic state." It primarily functions as an "electoral party" where success in elections, no matter how limited, provides the party the opportunity to form governments at the provincial level as well as have a presence in federal cabinets. This gives the party resources and power.⁴

The JUI-F has a firm organizational structure, and it has widespread support in KP, FATA and Baluchistan Province. Indeed, it is considered Pakistan's only political party that has a strong organizational structure in the volatile tribal areas. Much of the party's support derives from its connections to northwest Pakistan's network of *madrasas* (religious seminaries).⁵

The JUI-F has influence with many of Pakistan's militant groups, including those led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Waliur Rahman Mehsud.⁶ In June 2010, for example, the JUI-F pressured the government to release approximately 300 alleged Taliban members from prison, as the men were also JUI-F party members.⁷

The party is known for its close ties to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime. Demonstrating the connection between the groups, on October 26, 2011, the Afghan Taliban issued an unprecedented condolence statement for the death of Maulana Abdul Ghani, a deputy leader of JUI-F who died in a car accident in Baluchistan Province.⁸ Members of the Afghan Taliban

⁴ "Islamic Parties in Pakistan," International Crisis Group, December 16, 2011.

⁵ Personal interview, Ahmed Wali, journalist based in Karachi, March 3, 2012.

⁶ Hafiz Gul Bahadur is a Taliban militant commander operating in North Waziristan Agency, while Waliur Rehman Mehsud is the chief of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan's South Waziristan Agency chapter. Personal interview, anonymous journalist based in Bannu, March 6, 2011.

⁷ Zia Khan, "Govt to Set Free over 300 JUI-F Activists," *Express Tribune*, June 14, 2010.

⁸ Syed Shoaib Hassan, "Rare Taliban Praise for Pakistan's Maulana Abdul Ghani," BBC, October 27, 2011.

leadership were also in attendance at Abdul Ghani's funeral.⁹

Nevertheless, although the JUI-F is linked to Taliban militant groups operating in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the party has never openly supported sectarianism and violent jihad. As a result, many leaders terminated their association with the

"The JUI-F's members have also reportedly become concerned about the 'new Taliban' leaders in Pakistan who do not seem to appreciate the party's long-standing contribution to the Taliban's cause."

JUI-F after differences erupted over issues of sectarianism and violence in the 1980s and 1990s and then formed their own militant organizations—such as Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Harkat-ul-Mujahidin (HuM) and Jaysh-i-Muhammad (JM). All of these organizations are now declared banned by the government.¹⁰

The JUI-F itself is one of three splinter groups. One faction, known as Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam-Samiul Haq (JUI-S), was formed by Maulana Samiul Haq in the mid-1980s after Rahman refused to support the military ruler at the time, Ziaul Haq. Samiul Haq is commonly referred to as the "Father of the Afghan Taliban" due to his leadership of the Darul Uloom Haqqania *madrasa* in Akora Khattak, from where many of the top leaders of the Afghan Taliban movement, including Mullah Omar, graduated.¹¹

Another faction, Jamiat-i-Ulama-Islam-Nazariati (JUI-N), was formed by hardcore pro-Taliban leaders of the JUI-F in Baluchistan Province in the 2008 general elections. This splinter group complained that the JUI-F leadership

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Personal interview, Ahmed Wali, March 3, 2012.

¹¹ "Islamic Parties in Pakistan," International Crisis Group, December 16, 2011.

had abandoned the preaching of "jihad" and had stopped supporting the Afghan Taliban.¹² Incidentally, the JUI-N, led by Maulana Asmatullah, a member of parliament from Baluchistan, was the first religious party that organized a protest rally on May 2, 2011 in Quetta to pay homage to slain al-Qa`ida chief Usama bin Ladin. The JUI-N, unlike the JUI-F, is openly supportive of the Afghan Taliban.

Attacks on JUI-F Leaders

After the JUI-F's successes in the 2008 general elections, many Taliban militants appeared to turn against the party. From 2008 forward, Pakistani Taliban groups began to execute suicide attacks against the JUI-F's leadership. Dozens of JUI-F leaders, including former parliamentarians, have since been killed.¹³

Most recently, on January 25, 2012, Haji Gul Rahman Afridi, the former local chief of the JUI-F in the Landi Kotal area of Khyber Agency in FATA, was shot to death in the Shahi Bagh area of Peshawar by unidentified assailants.¹⁴ Another JUI-F leader and former mayor, Haji Muhammad Azeem, was killed on January 3, 2012, in the Naverkhel area of Lakki Marwat District of KP.¹⁵

Maulana Merajuddin, a former member of parliament from South Waziristan Agency and head of the JUI-F in the FATA region, was shot dead in May 2010 in Tank District of KP.¹⁶ Merajuddin was a key figure in the government's talks with tribal elders and militants, and he helped to broker peace deals in South Waziristan Agency in 2005 and 2007. Maulana Salimullah, a leader of the JUI-F, was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Karak District of KP on May 29, 2010.¹⁷

¹² Personal interview, Hafiz Fazal Barech, a leader of the JUI-N, November 12, 2011.

¹³ Tom Hussain, "New to Pakistan's Taliban-heavy Tribal Areas: Political Campaigns," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 31, 2011.

¹⁴ "JUI-F Leader Shot Dead in Peshawar," *Dawn*, January 26, 2012.

¹⁵ "JUI-F Leader Killed Near Naverkhel," *The Nation*, January 3, 2012.

¹⁶ "Peace Broker Gunned Down in Pakistan," UPI, May 21, 2010.

¹⁷ "JUI-F Leader Gunned Down in Karak," *Daily Times*, June 1, 2011.

Similarly, another former member of parliament from South Waziristan Agency, Maulana Noor Muhammad Wazir, was killed along with 30 other people in a suicide attack at a mosque in Wana in South Waziristan on August 24, 2010.¹⁸ Muhammad was also an influential figure who had several times acted as a negotiator between the Pakistani Taliban and the government, but was opposed to the presence of Uzbek militants in the region, providing support to dislodge them.¹⁹

Haji Khan Afzal, the former district mayor of Hangu District in KP and a central leader of the JUI-F, was killed on September 18, 2009, when a bomb ripped through a mosque in Kach Bazaar Killay in Hangu. Afzal played an important role in freeing government employees and others kidnapped by the TTP during and after clashes with Pakistan's security forces in the Doaba area of Kohat District in 2009.

Then, in 2012, the most egregious attacks on the JUI-F occurred. On March 30, militants attempted to assassinate JUI-F head Fazlur Rahman near Swabi District in KP. The following day in Charsadda District, militants again tried to assassinate Rahman. Both attempts failed.

Implications

Although political killings are part of Pakistan's history, attacks on the pro-Taliban JUI-F—especially on Rahman himself—are especially peculiar. The assassination attempts on Rahman came days after leaked U.S. State Department cables revealed that the JUI-F leader purportedly wanted to mediate between the United States and the Afghan Taliban in 2007. After this disclosure, Afghan Taliban militants and the al-Qa`ida leadership reportedly decided to sever links with the JUI-F.²⁰ Some experts believe that this

development could be one of the causes for the attempts on Rahman's life. Other analysts believe that the attacks on the JUI-F's leadership are a result of a growing ideological divide among Pakistani Taliban militants concerning the legitimacy of the Pakistani state. Pakistani Taliban militants openly denounce democracy and label the Pakistani state "un-Islamic," while the JUI-F supports democratic means as well as the authority of the Pakistani state.²¹ Indeed, it participated in the ruling coalition government.

It is difficult to say which factions among the Pakistani Taliban have an interest in attacking the JUI-F. The North Waziristan-based militant commander Hafiz Gul Bahadur, however, condemned the attacks and announced that an investigation will be conducted into the assassination attempts.²² Security analysts believe that the TTP may be behind the attacks, as it is thought that the TTP's relationship with the JUI-F has deteriorated over the last five years, and that the JUI-F has reduced some of its political support to the Taliban in general. As a result, the TTP and other Taliban groups have viewed the JUI-F's actions as a betrayal, and have attacked its leaders and activists.²³

The JUI-F's members have also reportedly become concerned about the "new Taliban" leaders in Pakistan who do not seem to appreciate the party's long-standing contribution to the Taliban's cause.²⁴ Attacks on public rallies and the killing of JUI-F leaders have likely caused the party to rethink its support to Taliban militants of all factions going forward.

It is pertinent to mention that the JUI-F has not joined the Difa-e-Pakistan Council (DPC)—an alliance of religious

parties—formed after a NATO airstrike killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011.²⁵ After the incident, Pakistan blocked NATO's road-bound supply routes into Afghanistan. The DPC and Taliban militant groups opposed the resumption of NATO supply convoys to Afghanistan, yet on April 12 Pakistan's parliament recommended allowing the convoys to continue. After a meeting among JUI-F chief Rahman, U.S. ambassador Cameron Munter and President Asif Ali Zardari, the JUI-F reluctantly approved of the decision.²⁶

These actions show that the JUI-F is now acting on the policy of adopting democratic and parliamentary politics instead of supporting militant and jihadist groups.

Conclusion

The attacks on JUI-F's leaders reveal intra-jihadist struggles in Pakistan. It also suggests that the JUI-F, Pakistan's largest Islamist political party, has likely reduced its support to Taliban militants of all factions. The attacks on JUI-F's rallies and leaders have compelled the party to present a more moderate face in public, criticizing the Taliban for un-Islamic acts and denouncing suicide attacks. Although the JUI-F draws much of its support from the more conservative and religious sections of Pakistan, this base does not necessarily support the violent actions of the Taliban.

Additionally, the unwillingness of the JUI-F to join the DPC is also an indication that the party is interested in pursuing democracy in Pakistan rather than increasing its support to banned militant groups and right-wing parties.

Zia Ur Rehman is a journalist and researcher and covers the militancy in Pakistan. He has written for several international and national publications including The Friday Times, Central Asia Online, The Jamestown Foundation, Himal South Asian and The News International and has contributed to the New York Times.

¹⁸ "South Waziristan Tense After Cleric's Killing," *Daily Times*, August 25, 2010.

¹⁹ Manzoor Ali, "Bomber Targets ex MNA in Wana," *Express Tribune*, August 24, 2010.

²⁰ In the words of one former Taliban official, "Maulana Fazlur Rahman, who has been an ally of the Pervez Musharraf regime and is also a partner in the present ruling coalition, had strong contacts with militant groups in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan but nobody did even imagine until now that he is constantly in touch with the Americans also." See Mazhar Tufail, "Fazlur Rehman

Getting Isolated After Wikileaks Exposure," *The News International*, December 8, 2010.

²¹ Personal interview, Ahmed Wali, March 3, 2012.

²² Pazir Gul, "Militant Leader to Investigate Attack of Fazl," *Dawn*, April 5, 2011.

²³ Nicholas Schmidle, "Next-Gen Taliban," *New York Times*, January 6, 2008.

²⁴ The JUI-F played a key role in the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad of the 1980s. Yet the current leadership of the Pakistani Taliban was too young to participate in the Afghan jihad, and as a result they do not appear to respect the JUI-F's contribution to that cause.

²⁵ For a detailed analysis of the DPC, see Arif Rafiq, "The Emergence of the Difa-e-Pakistan Islamist Coalition," *CTC Sentinel* 5.3 (2012).

²⁶ Raja Asghar, "No Arms Conduit, Green Signal for Non-Lethal Nato Supplies," *Dawn*, April 13, 2012.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

March 1, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Three militants shot to death two U.S. soldiers inside a joint Afghan-U.S. military base in Kandahar Province. Two of the militants were reportedly Afghan soldiers. U.S. forces returned fire, killing two of the assailants and wounding the third. - *CBS/AP, March 1*

March 2, 2012 (GLOBAL): The U.S. Treasury Department placed sanctions on a top Afghan Taliban bombmaker, identified as Abdul Samad Achezkai. - *AFP, March 2*

March 2, 2012 (UNITED STATES): A U.S. court sentenced Betim Kaziu, a New York City man, to 27 years in prison for traveling to the Middle East in a failed attempt to join al-Qa`ida. The 24-year-old man wanted to kill U.S. troops to avenge the abuse of Muslims. - *AP, March 2*

March 2, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Militants attacked a Pakistan Army position in the Tirah Valley of Khyber Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. At least 10 Pakistani soldiers and 23 militants were killed. - *Reuters, March 2*

March 2, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber targeted the Lashkar-i-Islam militant group in Khyber Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing at least 20 people. Lashkar-i-Islam is led by Mangal Bagh, and the group has been weakened recently in its Khyber Agency stronghold. - *BBC, March 2*

March 3, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan General Abdul Hameed said that the Taliban have a sophisticated method to infiltrate Afghanistan's security forces. "Placing the rogues inside the army is well-planned by the enemies," he said. "The Taliban give them special training. We must enhance intelligence gathering on the movements of recruits, tap their cellphones and we must find out who they are in contact with outside the army." According to Reuters, "About 70 members of the NATO-led force were killed in 42 insider attacks from May 2007 through the end of January this year [2012]." - *Reuters, March 3*

March 3, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber on foot targeted the convoy of Aftab Khan Sherpao, a senior politician and the former interior minister of Pakistan, in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province. The official escaped unharmed. - *Voice of America, March 3*

March 3, 2012 (ALGERIA): A suicide bomber rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the paramilitary gendarmerie headquarters in Tamanrasset, injuring at least 23 people. The Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, considered a splinter group of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, claimed responsibility. It was reportedly the first time militants launched an attack in the area. According to Agence France-Presse, "The Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (Jamat Tawhid Wal Jihad Fi Garbi Afriqqiya) surfaced in December [2011], when it claimed to be holding three Westerners kidnapped from a Western Sahara refugee camp in Algeria in October. Security sources said it had broken off from the main group, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), in order to spread jihad to west Africa and not confine themselves just to the Maghreb or Sahel regions." - *AP, March 2; AFP, March 3*

March 3, 2012 (SYRIA): A bomb killed seven people near a military checkpoint in Dera'a's Rawda district. Syrian authorities allege that the explosion was from a suicide bomber in a vehicle. - *Reuters, March 3*

March 3, 2012 (YEMEN): Two suicide bombers attacked a Republican Guard camp in Bayda in central Yemen, killing one soldier. According to reports, "the bombers deceived the guards by bringing in an ox that they said was a present for the camp commander. Once inside [the camp], they detonated their explosives." - *AP, March 3*

March 3, 2012 (PHILIPPINES): A bomb ripped through a commercial district on Jolo Island in the southern Philippines, killing two people. Authorities believe that the Abu Sayyaf Group was responsible. - *AFP, March 4*

March 4, 2012 (PAKISTAN): According to press reports, Hakimullah Mehsud, the leader of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), demoted Faqir Muhammad, who was previously the deputy head of the

group. No reason was given, but in the past Faqir Muhammad and other TTP leaders have disagreed over strategy. Faqir Muhammad operates out of Bajaur Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. - *BBC, March 5*

March 4, 2012 (YEMEN): Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) fighters overran a military post near Zinjibar in Abyan Province. After entering the facility, the AQAP fighters reportedly seized armored vehicles, artillery pieces, assault rifles and rockets, and then used those weapons against Yemeni troops, killing at least 180 soldiers. One Yemeni military official described it as a "massacre." Another 55 soldiers were captured and paraded through a neighboring town. Approximately 32 AQAP fighters died in the assault. - *AP, March 5; Voice of America, March 4; Telegraph, March 5; AP, March 6*

March 4, 2012 (YEMEN): Muhammad al-Hanq, a regional commander for al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), died from illness, according to an AQAP statement. - *AFP, March 8*

March 5, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated explosives near the entrance to Bagram airbase, killing at least two civilians. - *RTTNews, March 5*

March 5, 2012 (IRAQ): Gunmen disguised as an official security force opened fire on Iraqi police at multiple checkpoints in Haditha, killing 27 people. At approximately 2 AM, at least 14 black SUVs with more than 30 gunmen wearing SWAT-style uniforms entered Haditha, moving from target to target and executing Iraqi police. - *CNN, March 5*

March 6, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb ripped through an armored Warrior vehicle and killed six British soldiers in Helmand Province. - *AFP, March 8*

March 6, 2012 (RUSSIA): A female suicide bomber killed five policemen in the Russian North Caucasus republic of Dagestan. - *CNN, March 6; Voice of America, March 7*

March 7, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): An Afghan policeman allowed Taliban fighters to enter and kill nine other

policemen while they slept at a checkpoint in Uruzgan Province. – *New York Times, March 8*

March 7, 2012 (IRAQ): A car bomb exploded outside a restaurant in a Shi'a area of Tal Afar, Ninawa Province. As people gathered to help the wounded, a suicide bomber detonated explosives among them. At least 14 people were killed. – *CNN, March 7*

March 8, 2012 (NIGERIA): British citizen Chris McManus and Italian citizen Franco Lamolinara, who were being held hostage, were killed in a failed UK and Nigerian military rescue attempt. According to UK Prime Minister David Cameron, “A window of opportunity arose to secure their release. We also had reason to believe that their lives were under imminent and growing danger. The early indications are clear that both men were murdered by their captors, before they could be rescued.” Nigerian authorities allege that the Boko Haram group was holding the two hostage, but the group denied involvement. – *Bloomberg, March 9; Voice of America, March 9*

March 9, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) warned that they will attack government, police and military officials if three of Osama bin Laden’s wives are not released from Pakistani custody. “If the family of Osama bin Laden is not released as soon as possible, we will attack the judges, the lawyers and the security officials involved in their trial,” said a TTP spokesman. – *Reuters, March 9*

March 9, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Al-Qa`ida reportedly announced the death of Badr Mansoor, a key commander, saying that he was killed in a U.S. drone strike last month. – *AP, March 9*

March 9-10, 2012 (YEMEN): Suspected U.S. airstrikes killed an estimated 33 al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula militants in Yemen’s Abyan and Bayda provinces. – *RFE/RL, March 12*

March 10, 2012 (KENYA): A grenade killed at least six people at a bus station in Nairobi. Kenyan police have linked the Somalia-based al-Shabab to the attack. – *Voice of America, March 11*

March 11, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): The Taliban vowed revenge after a U.S. soldier allegedly shot and killed 16 Afghan civilians in Kandahar Province. U.S. forces immediately placed the U.S. soldier in custody. – *Fox News, March 12*

March 11, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber targeted a funeral in Peshawar, killing at least 13 people. – *AFP, March 10*

March 11, 2012 (NIGERIA): A suspected Boko Haram group suicide bomber attacked a Catholic church in the central Nigerian city of Jos, killing three people. After the bombing, Christian youth killed at least 10 people in reprisal attacks. – *Reuters, March 11*

March 12, 2012 (PHILIPPINES): A senior Malaysian police official said that Zulkifli bin Hir (also known as Marwan), a senior Jemaah Islamiya member who was reported killed on February 2, is likely still alive. A Philippine military official disputed the Malaysian report, saying that they believe Zulkifli bin Hir is dead. – *New York Times, March 13*

March 13, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle killed at least three Yemeni soldiers outside the town of al-Bayda. Ansar al-Shari`a claimed responsibility. – *BBC, March 13*

March 14, 2012 (SOMALIA): Al-Shabab militants launched a suicide bombing against the presidential palace in Mogadishu. The bomber, who blew himself up at the gates of the palace, killed at least five people. – *BBC, March 14*

March 15, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan President Hamid Karzai demanded that NATO troops withdraw from rural areas, and the Taliban declared a suspension of peace talks with the United States. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, “In practical terms, both developments might prove largely symbolic. Karzai does not have the power to enforce specific demands as to where Western troops are deployed, and U.S. contacts with the Taliban were in the very early stages.” The two developments occurred in the wake of a March 11 incident where a rogue U.S. soldier allegedly killed 16 Afghan civilians. – *Los Angeles Times March 15*

March 15, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber killed a senior Pakistani police officer in Peshawar. – *AFP, March 15*

March 16, 2012 (GLOBAL): According to documents recovered in Usama bin Ladin’s compound, provided to a *Washington Post* journalist, Bin Laden wanted to assassinate U.S. President Barack Obama and David Petraeus in Afghanistan. According to the *New York Times*, “The documents include one in which Bin Laden asked his top lieutenant, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, to find out from a Pakistani terrorist named Ilyas Kashmiri ‘the steps he has taken’ toward assassinating Mr. Obama and the top American general in the region.” All three of those men—Bin Laden, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman and Ilyas Kashmiri—are now dead. – *New York Times, March 16*

March 16, 2012 (GLOBAL): Al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri called on Pakistanis to join the Arab Spring uprisings and protest against their government. Al-Zawahiri said, “O our people in Pakistan! The Arab world around you is surging in a wave of revolution. Tyrants and oppressive rulers are falling. Why are you not making any move? Why are you not deposing these tyrants? Why are you not toppling these treacherous bribe-takers?” – *CNN, March 16*

March 17, 2012 (SYRIA): Explosions ripped through several government compounds in Damascus, killing at least 27 people. – *Voice of America, March 17*

March 18, 2012 (SYRIA): An explosion occurred near a government security building in Aleppo, killing at least two people. – *AP, March 17*

March 18, 2012 (YEMEN): Gunmen shot to death an American teacher in Taiz Province. Al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility. – *CNN, March 20*

March 20, 2012 (IRAQ): A wave of bombings rocked cities across Iraq, one week before the country hosts the annual Arab League summit for the first time in more than 20 years. The bombings killed at least 52 people. The Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility. – *Christian Science Monitor, March 20; AP, March 21*

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CONTACT

Combating Terrorism Center
U.S. Military Academy
607 Cullum Road, Lincoln Hall
West Point, NY 10996
Phone: (845) 667-6383
Email: sentinel@usma.edu
Web: www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/

* For Press Inquiries: (845) 667-6383

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

March 22, 2012 (FRANCE): French police killed Mohammed Merah, a Frenchman of Algerian origin, after a 30-hour standoff at his apartment in a suburb of Toulouse. Merah was responsible for a shooting spree that began on March 11, and resulted in the deaths of three soldiers, three Jewish children and a rabbi. French authorities said that Merah operated alone, and that there is no evidence he had any contact with established terrorist groups. - *AP, March 23; Reuters, March 22; Christian Science Monitor, March 23*

March 23, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber targeted militants from Lashkar-i-Islam, killing five people in Khyber Agency's remote Tirah Valley. Lashkar-i-Islam is currently fighting a number of rival militant groups in Khyber. - *BBC, March 23*

March 25, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan warned that it would assassinate lawmakers in Pakistan if they decide to reopen NATO supply routes to Afghanistan. - *Reuters, March 25*

March 27, 2012 (SPAIN): Spanish police arrested a suspected al-Qa`ida member who "administered one of the world's most important jihadist forums." The man, who was not identified, is Jordanian-born with Saudi citizenship. According to Spanish authorities, he was known within al-Qa`ida as the "librarian," and he worked 8-15 hours a day from home for al-Qa`ida, al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb and al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. - *Fox News, March 27*

March 27, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan intelligence officials reportedly arrested 16 people connected to a mass suicide bombing plot in Kabul. Approximately 11 suicide bomb vests were seized from inside Afghanistan's Defense Ministry. Some of the suspects were members of the Afghan National Army. - *Fox News, March 27*

March 28, 2012 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram group gunmen attacked a police station and military base in Yobe State, freeing 14 inmates. - *This Day, March 29; Reuters, March 30*

March 29, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Gunmen opened fire on the staff of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in Baluchistan Province, killing two people. - *AP, March 29*

March 30, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A member of a U.S.-backed Afghan village police force opened fire on his fellow officers as they slept in Paktika Province, killing all nine of them. After the attack, the gunman took all their weapons, placed them in a pickup truck, and drove away. The Taliban claimed responsibility. - *AP, March 30*

March 30, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. drone killed three alleged militants in Miran Shah in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. - *AP, March 29*

March 30, 2012 (YEMEN): A suspected U.S. drone killed four al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula militants in Shabwa Province. A second suspected drone attacked a building used by militants, but it was apparently empty at the time of the strike. - *AP, March 30*

March 31, 2012 (KENYA): An assailant threw a hand grenade into a crowded restaurant in Mombasa, injuring five people. There was no claim of responsibility. - *Reuters, March 31*

March 31, 2012 (THAILAND): A series of bomb explosions tore through Yala Province in southern Thailand, killing 14 people. The attacks marked the most deadly coordinated bomb assault in years in southern Thailand. - *Reuters, March 31; AP, April 1*

March 31, 2012 (YEMEN): Militants linked to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula launched a surprise attack on an army base in Lahj Province in southern Yemen. The militants were forced to retreat after airstrikes were called in. As a result of the fighting, 17 soldiers and 13 militants were killed. - *AP, March 31*